

# The Václav Havel Human Rights Prize



COUNCIL OF EUROPE



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## The Václav Havel Human Rights Prize



**T**he Václav Havel Human Rights Prize is awarded each year by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) in partnership with the Czech Government, the Václav Havel Library and the Charta 77 Foundation to reward outstanding civil society action in the defence of human rights in Europe and beyond.

■ Candidates must make a real difference to the human rights situation of a given group, be instrumental in uncovering systemic violations on a large scale, or have successfully mobilised public opinion or the international community for a given cause. The Prize consists of a sum of €60 000, a trophy and a diploma.

■ Launched on 25 March 2013 in Prague, the Prize is awarded in memory of Václav Havel, playwright, opponent of totalitarianism, architect of the 1989 Velvet Revolution, President of Czechoslovakia

and the Czech Republic, and an enduring symbol of opposition to despotism.

### The award ceremony

■ The Prize is awarded at a ceremony which takes place in Strasbourg on the Monday of the Autumn Session of the Parliamentary Assembly, usually in late September or early October. The name of the prizewinner is announced by the President of the Parliamentary Assembly.

### Conference in honour of the prizewinner

■ The Václav Havel Library organises, at a later date, an international conference in Prague in honour of the prizewinner.

<http://assembly.coe.int>

# THE PRIZEWINNERS



**Ales  
Bialiatski**  
*2013 Prizewinner*

**O**n 30 September 2013, the Prize was awarded to human rights activist Ales Bialiatski (Belarus).

For many years Mr Bialiatski has fought in Belarus to assist victims of political repression and to spread information worldwide on human rights violations in the country. He is Chairman of the Human Rights Centre Viasna, which he set up in 1996, and – since 2007 – Vice-President of the International Federation on Human Rights. Mr Bialiatski was imprisoned in 2011 following a trial unanimously condemned by the international community and was released in June 2014.

As Mr Bialiatski was in detention at the time of the ceremony, the prize was presented to his wife, Natalia Pinchuk.

Presenting the Prize, PACE President Jean-Claude Mignon, chair of the selection

panel, said: “In his daily struggle against violations of human rights, injustice, arbitrariness and authoritarianism, Ales Bialiatski has worked ceaselessly so that the citizens of Belarus may one day aspire to our European standards.”



# Anar Mammadli

*2014 Prizewinner*



**O**n September 2014, the Prize was awarded to human rights defender Anar Mammadli (Azerbaijan).

Mr Mammadli is the founder and chairperson of the Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Centre (EMDS) in Azerbaijan. Since 2001, this organisation has been carrying out independent election monitoring in the country. He was arrested in December 2013 on charges of “abuse of power” and other matters, and sentenced to five-and-a-half years in prison in May 2014. He was released from prison in March 2016.

As Mr Mammadli was in detention in September 2014, the Prize was presented to his father, Asaf Mammadov.

Presenting the Prize, PACE President Anne Brasseur, chair of the selection panel, said: “Mr Mammadli’s commitment lies in

the area of promoting democratic institutions and civil and political rights. Anar Mammadli is our long-standing partner who shared with our Assembly, but also with other bodies of the Council of Europe, including its Commissioner for Human Rights, his valuable expertise on the situation in his country.”







# Ludmilla Alexeeva

*2015 Prizewinner*

**O**n 28 September 2015, the Prize was awarded to human rights defender Ludmilla Alexeeva (Russia).

Ms Alexeeva is an eminent human rights defender in Russia. In her youth, she gave up a promising academic career to join the Soviet dissident movement, going on to become a founding member of the Moscow Helsinki Group. Forced to emigrate to the US in 1977, she returned to Russia in 1989 to continue her work, becoming President of the International Helsinki Foundation and later joining the Russian President's Commission on Human Rights. She has worked relentlessly for the protection and promotion of the rule of law.

Presenting the Prize, PACE President Anne Brasseur, chair of the selection panel, said: "Ludmilla Alexeeva has inspired many generations of activists in Russia, but also abroad, to commit themselves to the struggle for justice. During the decades of her work, Ms Alexeeva was persecuted

and threatened, she lost her employment and she had to leave her country in order to continue to speak out about human rights violations in the Soviet Union. Today she chairs the Moscow Helsinki Group, an organisation that often faces a hostile environment as a free-thinking NGO, but nonetheless continues to denounce human rights violations and offers help to victims. I am honoured to see Ms Alexeeva in this hemicycle today, and I applaud her life long commitment." Ms Alexeeva passed away in December 2018.



# Nadia Murad

*2016 Prizewinner*



**O**n 10 October 2016, the Prize was awarded to Nadia Murad, a Yazidi human rights activist (Iraq).

At the age of 21, Nadia Murad was kidnapped by ISIS in northern Iraq, together with thousands of other women and children. She was kept in slavery and abused for three months until she managed to escape and flee to Germany. Since then, she has become a human rights activist, bringing the plight of the Yazidi community, in particular the forced sexual enslavement and human trafficking of women and children captured by ISIS, to the forefront of international attention. In 2016, she was appointed as the first United Nations Goodwill Ambassador for the Dignity of Survivors of Human Trafficking and received the Sakharov Prize awarded by the European Parliament. She was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2018.

Presenting the Prize, PACE President Pedro Agramunt, chair of the selection

panel, said: "This year would have marked the 80th birthday of Václav Havel. He is not with us any more, but his legacy is more relevant than ever. In times when we are facing renewed challenges to the unity of Europe, when diversity is becoming a dividing element, and people are starting to look at each other with suspicion and mistrust, we must turn back to his message."



# Murat Arslan

*2017 Prizewinner*

Murat ARSLAN

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**O**n 9 October 2017, the Prize was awarded to Murat Arslan, Turkish defender of the independence of the judiciary.

■ In detention since 2016, Murat Arslan is a former rapporteur of the Turkish Constitutional Court and former president of the now dissolved Association for the Union of Judges and Prosecutors (YARSAV). He is a staunch supporter of the independence of the judiciary. As Mr Arslan was in detention in October 2017, the Prize was presented to a representative of the association MEDEL (European Magistrates for Democracy and Freedoms).

■ Presenting the Prize, Acting PACE President Sir Roger Gale, chair of the selection panel, said: "With the Václav Havel Human Rights Prize, we want to honour all human rights defenders who, every day, make an outstanding contribution for the protection and promotion of human rights, strongly

believing in their cause. We applaud their efforts, as Václav Havel himself advocated, to build a more just and more peaceful society, to prompt us to reflect on what we are, or are not, doing and to guide us, like a moral compass, in the right direction."





# Oyub Titiev

## 2018 Prizewinner



**O**n 8 October 2018, the Prize was awarded to the prominent human rights defender Oyub Titiev (Russian Federation).

Mr Titiev, in detention since January 2018, is the head of the Grozny office of the Memorial Human Rights Center in Chechnya. In this capacity, Mr Titiev succeeded Natalia Estemirova, murdered in 2009, and has made a widely recognised contribution to the defence of human rights in the region by reporting on abuses by the local authorities.

"We are fully aware of the difficulties that Mr Titiev and his colleagues face. This prize is a recognition of the work he and Memorial are doing," the PACE President said. "It is also a message to all those who work in this region to affirm the principles of the rule of law and human rights. Keep up the good work, you can count on our support," Liliane Maury Pasquier added.

Mr Titiev being in detention, the prize was presented to Aleksandr Cherkasov, Chairman of the Memorial Human Rights Centre Board.



# Ilham Tohti

*2019 Prizewinner*



# The Youth Initiative for Human Rights

*2019 Prizewinner*



**O**n 30 September 2019, the Prize was awarded jointly to imprisoned Uyghur intellectual Ilham Tohti from China and the Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR), which brings together young people from across the Balkans to promote reconciliation.

**Ilham Tohti**, a renowned Uyghur public intellectual in China, has worked for over 20 years to improve the situation of the Uyghur minority and to foster inter-ethnic dialogue and understanding in China. In September 2014, he was sentenced to life imprisonment. Mr Tohti being in detention, the prize was received in Strasbourg on his behalf by Enver Can of the Ilham Tohti Initiative.

**The Youth Initiative for Human Rights**, established in 2003, promotes reconciliation through building connections between young people across the Balkans from different ethnic groups, regions and countries. By working together for human rights, they aim to build links that

can prevent the re-emergence of ethnic conflict in the region.

The action taken by the two prize-winners “carries a message of hope for all those who aspire to build a better world, one where the dignity, rights and basic liberties of everyone are respected and guaranteed,” said PACE President Liliane Maury Pasquier. “We show our recognition and support for them, we also send a message of hope to the millions of people they represent and for whom they work. Human rights have no frontiers.”





” Human rights  
are universal  
and indivisible

Václav Havel

**V**áclav Havel was born on 5 October 1936. After earning a degree from the Higher Technical College in Prague through evening classes, his passion for the theatre caught up with him towards the end of the 1950s. Theatre was for him a means of expressing and furthering his democratic ideals.

## Opposition following the repression of the Prague Spring

■ In 1971 his works were officially banned. But it was at the time of the repression of the Prague Spring in 1968, following the invasion of Czechoslovakia by Soviet troops, that his action took on another dimension. The international community was struck by this dissident, in particular after the open letter he addressed to President Gustav Husák in 1975 in which he denounced the situation of society and the responsibility of the political regime.

■ His action as co-founder and spokesperson of the renowned Charter 77 Foundation, which called for the respect of human rights, resulted in multiple terms of imprisonment.

## Velvet Revolution and a country in transition

■ The fall of the communist regime brought an end to the Socialist Republic of Czechoslovakia after the events of the Velvet Revolution, from 16 November to 29 December 1989. Unanimously supported by the tide of opinion, Václav Havel was invested as President of the Czechoslovak Republic. He is therefore one of the very rare heads of state to have come to power without having sought the office. He implemented the necessary reforms in the administration of his country to ensure its transition to a market economy.



■ Václav Havel stepped down as president in July 1992, as he was opposed to the prospect of separating the Czech and Slovak peoples. However, in September of the same year, an agreement was reached with the government, which led to his re-election in January 1993 as President of the newly independent Czech Republic. He held this office until 2003.

■ The Czech Republic became a member state of the Council of Europe on 30 June 1993. The same year, Václav Havel, President of the Czech Republic, participated in the 1st Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe, held on 8 October in Vienna. In his address, with reference to the Council of Europe, he said that it "exists to cultivate the values from which the spirit and ethos of European integration might grow, and to ensure that these values are embodied in international legal standards. If, as I contend, the main task of Europe today is to grasp the spirit of its own unification, to understand the moral obligations that flow from that, to assume genuinely, and not just superficially a new type of responsibility for itself, then the Council of Europe can play a unique and indispensable role in carrying out this complex task."

■ In 1995, at the inauguration of the new headquarters of the European Court of Human Rights, Václav Havel voiced the hope that "human reason, decency, solidarity and preparedness to seek understanding and to live together in fairness will triumph over everything which threatens them. I have no doubt that the Council of Europe and its various institutions, including those to reside in this building, will make a major contribution towards achieving this not by using instruments of power, which it does not have, but by pursuing further the great



endeavour which it undertook several decades ago, that is, by continuing to promote, intensify and spread a good spirit of co-operation among nations."

■ After having played a vital role in the reunification of Europe, divided by the Cold War, Václav Havel was in favour of his country's rapid accession to the European Union, which took place in 2004.

■ Despite failing health, Václav Havel pursued his fight for human rights in Cuba, Belarus, Burma and Russia. He also returned to his first love with the publication of his political memoirs in 2006 and a further play "*Leaving*" in 2008.

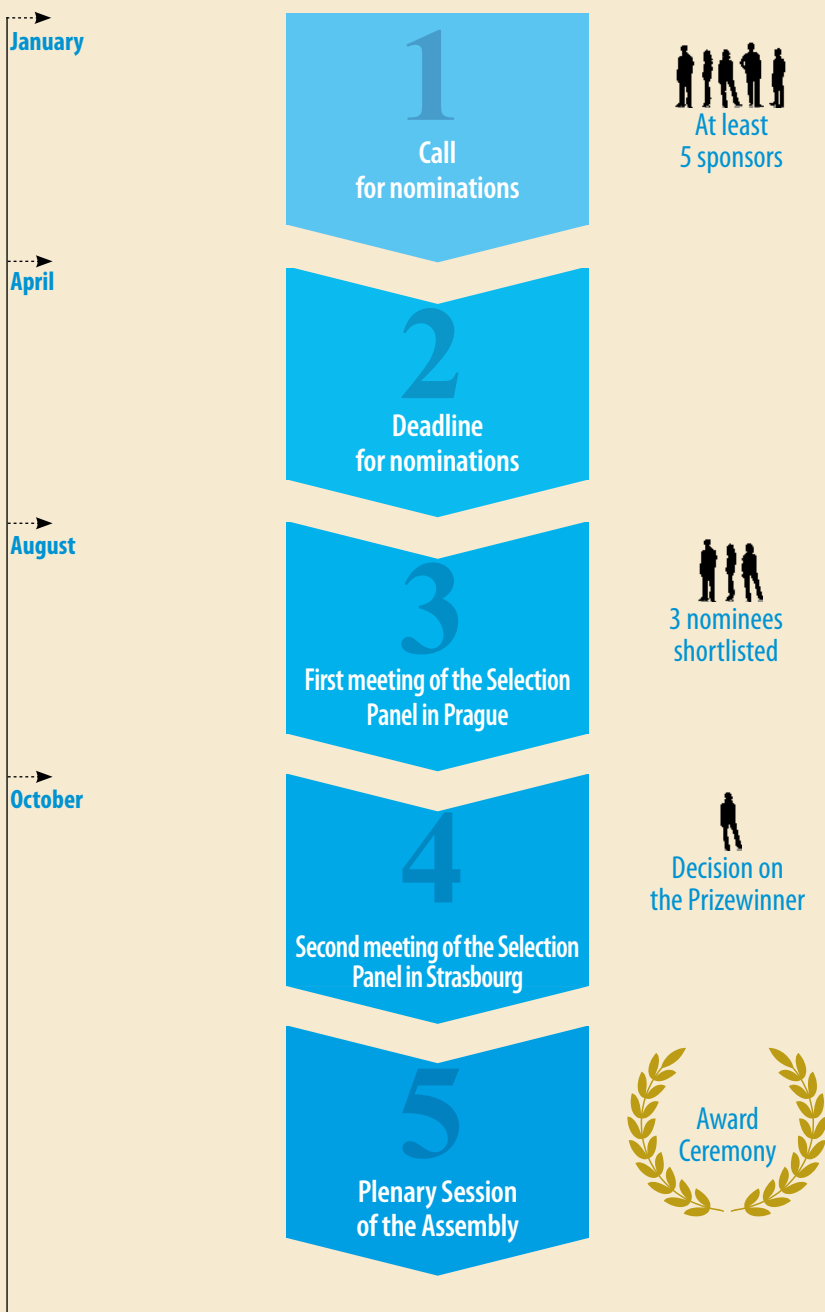
■ Václav Havel died on 18 December 2011.

Sources :

[www.touteleurope.eu](http://www.touteleurope.eu)

[http://website-pace.net/en\\_GB/web/apce/vaclav-havel-human-rights-prize](http://website-pace.net/en_GB/web/apce/vaclav-havel-human-rights-prize)

# TIMELINE AND PROCEDURE



Awarded each year since 2013 by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in partnership with the Czech Government, the Václav Havel Library and the Charta 77 Foundation, the Václav Havel Human Rights Prize rewards outstanding civil society action in the defence of human rights in Europe and beyond.

This brochure presents Václav Havel, his life and his achievements, and the winners of the prize created in his memory.

**[www.coe.int](http://www.coe.int)**

The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 47 member states, including all members of the European Union. The Parliamentary Assembly, consisting of representatives from the 47 national parliaments, provides a forum for debate and proposals on Europe's social and political issues. Many Council of Europe conventions originate from the Assembly, including the European Convention on Human Rights.



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